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Challenges for Agricultural Research”

## Integrating Subjectivity, Self-reflection and Dialogue in Agricultural Research and Development Projects

ELISABETH GOTSCHI<sup>1</sup>, ANDREAS HUNGER<sup>2</sup>, BERNHARD FREYER<sup>1</sup>, ROBERT DELVE<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>University of Natural Resources and Applied Life Sciences, Institute of Organic Farming, Austria

<sup>2</sup>Johannes Kepler University Linz,

<sup>3</sup>International Centre for Tropical Agriculture (CIAT), Zimbabwe

### Abstract

Globalisation and neo-liberal policies have an impact on development cooperation, as well as, „research for development” initiatives. More and more small projects are being replaced by programmes and budgetary support mechanisms, to address concerns over the limited focus and impact of individual projects. Though budgetary support is meant in theory to empower governments to take their own decisions and allow control over the development process, the implementation, however, has proven difficult. This paper reflects on problems in the organisation and implementation of agricultural and rural development projects. The „field theory” of Bourdieu (1979, 1993) is used to analyse challenges and problems of so-called participatory approaches. This paper argues that transdisciplinary research can contribute to the improvement of “research for development”, agricultural and rural development projects in the South and the North as the global challenges do not stop in the so-called Third World but also need to be faced in the industrialised countries. Industrialized country vs. developing country; NGOs vs. beneficiaries, political vs. economic elites vs. farmers, workers in the formal and informal sector, are areas competing over these project resources. These “fields” try to distinguish themselves from others, so as to establish criteria (norms, values) that justify exclusion. Development cooperation, as well as, research for development, are fields themselves that need to consider these tendencies in their own work. The challenges are to be self-reflective and more critical towards their own field and its limitations, trying to be more open and collaborative with other partners to ensure targeting of the economically poor, the “beneficiaries” more effectively. For rural or agricultural development, or research projects, it is not sufficient to engage in “participatory” processes at regional or national headquarters, but requires working directly with farmers, men, women and children at the grassroots level. Acknowledgement of different preferences within the household and community, market instabilities and food security issues urge to focus on subsistence needs and consider socio-cultural qualities.

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